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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-fifth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 496th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 7 October 1994, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. LARSEN (Denmark)

later: Mr. KAMAL (Pakistan)

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GE.94-04046 (95-95307/EXT)

The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

PARTICIPATION OF GOVERNMENT OBSERVER DELEGATIONS (agenda item 6) (A/AC.96/XLV/CRP.2)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that, in accordance with a decision taken by the Executive Committee in 1988, meetings of the Sub-committees and informal meetings of the Executive Committee were open to participation by government observer delegations which made formal applications for consideration by the Executive Committee. Document A/AC.96/XLV/CRP.2 contained the list of observer Governments which had made such applications for 1995. In addition, applications had been received from the Governments of Armenia, Ireland, Slovenia, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh and Cyprus. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee approved those applications.

2. It was so decided.

CONSIDERATION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE FORTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (agenda item 7) (A/AC.96/XLV/CRP.1)

3. The CHAIRMAN said that, if there was no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee adopted the provisional agenda of its forty-sixth session (A/AC.96/XLV/CRP.1).

4. The provisional agenda (A/AC.96/XLV/CRP.1) was adopted.

ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT REPORT OF THE FORTY-FIFTH SESSION (agenda item 9) (A/AC.96/XLV/CRP.3)

The meeting was suspended at 11.05 a.m. and resumed at 11.55 a.m.

5. Mr. Kamal (Pakistan) took the Chair.

6. Mr. MANGACHI (United Republic of Tanzania, Rapporteur) introduced the draft report on the forty-fifth session of the Executive Committee (A/AC.96/XLV/CRP.3) and said that a number of changes had to be made in the text. The first two were substantive changes to paragraphs (r) and (s) of the general conclusion on international protection (chap. III. A.1, para. 19).

7. The last part of paragraph (r) should be changed to read as follows:

> "...as a pragmatic and flexible method of affording international protection of a temporary nature in situations of conflict or persecution involving large-scale outflows;".

8. The words "including the duration of temporary protection" should be added at the end of paragraph (s).

9. Two editorial changes should be made to the text of the conclusion on the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees (chap. II. D.3, para. 31).

10. The fifth preambular paragraph of the conclusion should be amended to read:

"Noting with gratitude the work done by all the Governments concerned and the competent intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations during the past year,".

11. The term "non-refugees" should be deleted from the second-last line of operative paragraph (d) of the conclusion.

12. The draft report of the forty-fifth session (A/AC.96/XLV/CRP.3), as amended, was adopted.

OTHER MATTERS (agenda item 8)

13. Mr. NORBERG (Sweden), speaking on behalf of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, said that for the Nordic countries improvement of the functioning of the United Nations must be designed above all to enable Member States to perform their governance functions better and guarantee secure and predictable financial support for the United Nations and therefore for UNHCR at a level commensurate with their responsibilities.

14. In view of the large number of matters which the Executive Committee would have to take up over the coming months, it was important for the Bureau and all the members of the Committee to make a joint effort to plan the work as efficiently as possible and to establish an order of priorities. The considerable amount of work done by the Sub-committees over the past year had led to significant advances in the consideration of various broad policy issues, such as the problems which arose in countries of origin and internally displaced persons. Such progress would not have been possible if an attempt had been made to deal with all those issues during the session of the Executive Committee. The value of the Sub-committees was therefore evident, and active use should be made of them.

15. But the Executive Committee must seek to improve further its methods of work as it provided UNHCR with its very valuable guidance. The Member States which requested the Office to use resources efficiently must themselves use costly committee time efficiently. The process of formulating decisions and conclusions, for example, was a cumbersome one, and more of it should be taken over by the Sub-committees. The Nordic delegations therefore welcomed the idea of holding consultations and a preparatory meeting during the next two months to establish the priority issues which the Sub-committees should take up and to review the Executive Committee's methods of work.

16. With regard to improving the funding and finances of UNHCR, the delegations of the United Kingdom, Canada and the Nordic countries, together with other delegations, had submitted to the General Assembly, which was reviewing the financial systems of United Nations funds and programmes, proposals for a revision of financial planning to place UNHCR on a more secure and predictable funding base.

17. The proportion of UNHCR expenditure under the regular budget of the United Nations was declining and the proportion of special programmes, which now accounted for almost 70% of the total budget, was increasing to the detriment of the general programmes. In other words, more and more activities were being undertaken with increasingly less predictable funding.

18. The Nordic countries would participate in such a review in conjunction with the other donors and UNHCR; within the framework of the review attention should also be given to the relationship between the general and special programmes.

19. Mrs. SAV (Turkey) said that in order not to hold up the work of the Executive Committee she would refrain for the moment from exercising her right of reply to what had been said at the previous meeting by the delegation of the Greek Administration of Cyprus, but she would submit a reply later in writing.

20. Mrs. MARKIDES (Observer for Cyprus) said that Cyprus was a country recognized by the international community and that the Cypriot delegation at the session of the Executive Committee represented the Government of the Republic of Cyprus and not the Greek Administration of Cyprus as the representative of Turkey had dared to put it.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION (agenda item 10)

21. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked the Chairman for the skilful way in which he had conducted the work and all the participants for their thought-provoking statements, which had made the Executive Committee session an extremely constructive one. She deeply appreciated the warm tributes which delegations had paid to her and her staff. The dedication and diligence of the UNHCR staff, many of whom were working in some of the most distant and dangerous parts of the world, were the organization's strength, and everything must be done to ensure their safety and well-being.

22. The way in which refugee problems were handled had a direct impact on international stability, security and economic progress. It was encouraging to note that the members of the Committee supported a comprehensive and concerted strategy of prevention, preparedness and solutions. Many delegations had also rightly identified the new window of opportunity offered by regional approaches, which would be explored further in the coming months.

23. However, given the limits of prevention and the fragility of solutions, UNHCR must remain ever ready to protect the uprooted. Humanitarian assistance was not only about relief; it was first and foremost about protecting the human rights and well-being of the victims. As the need for protection grew, the bridging of the gaps in existing instruments, institutions and practices was becoming a major concern, whether for refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons or stateless persons. There must be a continuing effort to study new tools of temporary protection without undermining existing principles, to continue to seek ways of addressing the protection needs of returnees and, in cooperation with all the actors in the field of human rights and humanitarian action, to ensure that the protection of the internally displaced was not overlooked. She hoped that during the coming year it would be possible to give more thought to the plight of the stateless, perhaps at the intercessional meeting of the Sub-committee on International Protection.

24. She had noted the positive comments on the concept of "service packages" as a useful emergency response mechanism. UNHCR would seek to refine the concept in the light of the lessons learned in the Rwanda emergency. She intended to appoint a senior staff member to follow up as a matter of priority

the initiatives already launched to enhance the Office's capacity and expand its partnerships. UNHCR would also continue to upgrade its existing programmes and procedures. The improvement of the situation of refugee women and children would remain a priority concern.

25. For several years UNHCR had been endeavouring to expand its partnerships. In support of that effort the Committee had again underscored the need for the international system to better coordinate and dovetail its efforts to meet the needs of the victims and to promote solutions, particularly by linking relief to rehabilitation and development. With regard to prevention, preparedness and solutions UNHCR was fully aware that it must work closely with all the other actors - international and regional, governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental. Some progress had been made, but much more needed to be done to fill the gaps while still avoiding overlapping and to address the imbalances while enhancing complementarity. The convening of a joint informal meeting of the governing bodies of WFP, UNICEF, UNDP and UNHCR was an interesting proposal; given the diversity and size of the governing bodies, such a meeting would need careful preparation.

26. The ultimate test of effective cooperation and coordination was the speed and quality of the response in the field. While always striving to do better, it was important to recognize that the various partners, whether they belonged to the United Nations system or not, had already established cooperation and coordination in the field and that their effectiveness was best promoted by a clear division of labour based on competence and capacity.

27. She was acutely conscious of the increasing demands made on UNHCR, which stretched its capacity to respond as well as its ability to innovate. She had noted the unease about the imbalance between the general and special programmes which was being exacerbated by the increasing number of emergencies and large-scale repatriation operations. She fully supported the envisaged discussion at one of the forthcoming meetings of the Sub-committee on Financial and Administrative Matters which, it was to be hoped, would help to provide UNHCR with a more secure financial base for the years to come.

28. She was very grateful for the financial contributions announced by Governments during the session, which amounted to almost $US 119 million and she thanked the asylum countries for their contributions, which could not be so easily quantified. The environmental damage and socio-economic strains caused by the presence of large numbers of refugees in the asylum countries was only part of the toll which they were forced to pay for their generous hospitality and solidarity. She urged the international community to address those issues more consistently in the context of rehabilitation and development.

29. She had listened with great interest to the statements by delegations, which reflected the richness and diversity of the Committee's membership. The Committee was in fact the gathering place for countries from the four corners of the planet, countries dealing with all aspects of the refugee problem, countries of origin, countries of asylum and donor countries, as well as international and non-governmental organizations. The value of the international forum provided by the Committee lay in the opportunities for dialogue which it offered; the special nature of the Committee must be preserved as the search for ways of improving its functioning continued.

30. The session of the Executive Committee was about to end, but its work in the service of refugees continued around the globe. It was gratifying and reassuring to know that in its difficult work UNHCR enjoyed the confidence of Governments and the cooperation of international and non-governmental organizations. The Committee's encouragement and guidance were particularly valuable to UNHCR at a time when humanitarian action had become a critical element in the efforts of the international community to promote peace, security and development.

31. The CHAIRMAN thanked all the participants, for through their spirit of conciliation they had enabled the Executive Committee to work in a constructive manner. The programme for the next 12 months was a heavy one, but the various meetings which the Sub-committees would have to hold would provide an opportunity to continue a fruitful dialogue. He declared the forty-fifth session of the Executive Committee closed.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.